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AUTHOR	Pan, Yuling
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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the role of cultural education in the advanced Chinese language course first outlines a communicative approach to second language teaching and testing, defines culture and looks at its importance to the second language learner, and describes methods for creating a language classroom environment reflecting Chinese culture. The communicative approach discussed emphasizes the importance of rules of language use within a given culture, and the need to knów that culture. A distinction is made between cultural information and behavioral patterns in a culture, and it is stressed that cultural information alone is not an adequate basis for adults to use the language communicatively because it does not reflect norms of communicative behavior. At the advanced level, focus is on development of learners' sociocultural and strategic competence, and a topical approach is used to teach both language and culture. Topics are: introduction to varieties of Chinese language; government structure and politics; economic reform; military; social problems in contemporary society; modern history; legal system and practices; educational system; agriculture and industry; culture and value system; family issues; political movements; mass media and public opinion; population and ethnic issues; business practices; and foreign policies. Classroom activities include reading, listening, lecture, discussion, and student reports. Specific techniques and requirements for each are outlined. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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IMPLEMENTING CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN CHINESE TEACHING

Yuling Pan

Linguistics Department, Georgetown University

0. Introduction

It has been widely accepted that culture is an indispensable element of foreign/second language teaching. Studies in foreign language teaching from the perspective of sociolinguistics reveal that communicative competence is what a learner should finally achieve in the course of foreign language learning. However, what to teach as communicative competence and how to implement cultural elements in a foreign language classroom remain problems for teachers of foreign language.

My current study aims at developing a language course for advanced learners (U.S. government scale 2 and above) that creates a Chinese cultural context in a classroom setting: a topical approach to Chinese language and culture. Based on the theory of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing proposed by Canale & Swain (1980), I argue that to implement cultural elements in Chinese teaching is, first of all, to provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture and way of behavior. By defining culture in terms of behavioral pattern, I make a distinction between what I call 'hard facts' of a culture and the system of a culture. For adult learners, the system of a culture, or the behavioral pattern of

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the target language should be the focus in teaching for advanced students. In other words, sociolinguistic competence (Canale & Swain's term 1980) should be emphasized throughout the course of language learning.

There are three parts in the present paper: (1) summary of Canale & Swain's framework of communicative approach to second language teaching and testing; (2) definition of culture, and the importance of the awareness on the part of students as to "what lies behind the language"; (3) presentation of how to create a Chinese cultural surrounding in the classroom for teaching purposes. The example of successfully training U.S. diplomats in Diplomatic Language Services, Inc. is presented as evidence to show the feasibility and effectiveness of such implementation. Finally I conclude that the wide acceptance of sociolinguistic principles seems to have outdated any discussion of the importance of cultural knowledge in foreign language teaching. What needs our attention now is experiments that will help the successful implementation of cultural elements at various stages of the learning process.

1. Canale & Swain's framework of communicative approach to second language teaching and testing

Based on Hymes' (1971) notion of communicative competence, which refers to "the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and

sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use" (Canale & Swain, 1980:6), Canale & Swain outline three components of communicative competence, namely, grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence in their theoretical framework of communicative approach to second language teaching.

In their framework, the first component, grammatical competence, is the 'knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology' (1980:29). The second component, sociolinguistic competence, is made up of two sets of rules: (1) sociocultural rules of use, which specify the ways in which utterances are produced and understood appropriately with respect to the components of communicative events (Hymes' notion, 1964); (2) rules of discourse, which includes the concept of cohesion (i.e. grammatical links) and coherence (i.e. appropriate combination of communicative functions). The last one is strategic competence, 'made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence' (1980:30).

Canale & Swain's framework emphasizes the importance of rules of language use in a given culture. When and how to apply these rules requires a comprehensive knowledge of the culture in which the language is used. Even though some rules are universal (for example, rules of politeness proposed by Lakoff, 1973), the

orders of precedence of these rules at work in different cultures may not be the same. Therefore it is essential to increase students' awareness of behavioral patterns in the target culture and to cultivate their sensitivity to sociocultural rules of usage when learning the target language. Following this argument, when teaching Chinese to American students, especially to adult learners, special attention should be paid to how to provide students with a situation that allows them to develop their communicative competence and to have a general understanding of Chinese culture.

In order to achieve this goal, a topical approach to teaching Chinese language and culture is adopted in our language program to train government personnel and diplomats. A discussion of this approach will be presented in the following two sections.

2. Cultural information vs. behavioral pattern

As I already mentioned, it is important to make a distinction between what I call cultural information and behavioral pattern in a culture. When talking about culture, I follow the anthropological definition of culture, that is, 'culture is all learned behavior which is socially acquired,...' and 'is a way of behaving, thinking, and reacting' (Nida, 1954:28,29). Cultural information is talking about facts and manifestations of a culture, like things made or used by people,

or what people do and say to celebrate their holidays. Behavioral pattern in a culture as defined by anthropologists is the way of behaving, thinking and reacting. It is a socialization process (Ochs's term, 1988) in which members of a culture acquire the sociocultural knowledge and shared behaviors. From an anthropological and sociolinguistic point of view, language acquisition is also a socialization process (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, Ochs, 1988). This view has a great impact on second/foreign language learning, for learning a new language is actually being socialized by the culture in which the language is used.

When talking about implementing cultural elements in Chinese language teaching, a common practice is to describe facts of Chinese culture. For example, in the textbook "Practical Chinese Reader" (Liu, et al. 1988), there are cultural notes after each lesson. These notes describe some typical Chinese products like tea, wine, food, or Chinese music, Beijing opera, and customs such as how people celebrate holidays. These cultural notes fall into the category of what I term cultural information. One feature of this kind of cultural information is its unambiguity. Ignorance of this cultural information is less likely to cause misunderstandings or break-downs in communication. If students do not know the name of a famous Chinese tea, it does not follow that they will not get anything to drink in China.

One characteristic of such cultural information is that it

is easy to describe and present, and easily understood by students. No doubt, this is useful information for students to possess, especially when teaching Chinese to children. Because of their cognitive development, children are not able to comprehend complicated or abstract concepts, and these cultural facts make language lessons interesting while making a foreign culture visible and tangible to them.

For adult learners, however, it is far from sufficient to have a mere description of hard facts. Many people are taking Chinese courses because they have to go to China to work or to do business. In other words, they have to use Chinese language in a real world situation. Therefore, how to behave appropriately in the Chinese context and what norms to follow in communication become a main concern. As many studies (e.g. Tannen's (1984) work on conversational style by New York Jews, Young's (1982) paper on Chinese argument pattern, Matsumoto's (1988) study on Japanese politeness phenomena, Kochman's (1981) book on black and white styles in conflict, and Pan's (1993) work on Chinese directives and politeness strategies) show that different cultures have different behavioral norms and strategies for communication. Failure to recognize and follow these norms will result in communication break-down and cause misunderstanding and hard feelings between interlocutors.

When students' language proficiency level is high, it is extremely important to stress the use of sociocultural rules and

strategic rules appropriate to the Chinese context. The higher the proficiency level, the more they are expected to behave appropriately when using the Chinese language. This is because when a student with low proficiency level makes a mistake due to the lack of background cultural knowledge, listeners will think that is a language problem, not a behavioral or attitudinal problem. However, when someone speaking Chinese fluently makes the same mistake, listeners will not take it as a mere language problem. Instead, they will judge the speaker's personality and attitude based on the language performance. In this sense, language has judgmental and attitudinal value. So it is highly important to train our students to recognize the Chinese way of behaving, thinking and reacting.

Based on this argument, when designing syllabi for training government personnel or diplomats, special attention is paid to implementing cultural elements at the various stages of learning. At the beginning level, what students need is the basic survival skill to function in Chinese speaking environment. At this stage, grammatical competence, that is, knowledge of Chinese syntax, phonology, lexicon, is the focus while at the same time cultural facts are introduced to students both in Chinese and English, since their Chinese language proficiency is low. At the intermediate level, emphasis is placed on expansion of vocabulary and development of complicated sentence structure while sociocultural competence and strategic competence are introduced.

At the advanced level, the focus is the development of sociocultural and strategic competence on the part of students. In order to achieve this goal, we develop a topical approach to increase students' awareness of behavioral pattern in the Chinese context and to cultivate their sensitivity to sociocultural rules of language use. The approach will be elaborated in the following section.

3. A topical approach to teach Chinese language and culture

The goal of a topical approach is to create a Chinese cultural surrounding in the classroom for teaching purposes. Students are exposed to various aspects of Chinese society and culture. Authentic materials, including reading, audio and video materials, are used throughout the course, which is designed for students with an advanced language proficiency level. The course consists of a series of topics, which attempt to give a comprehensive view of Chinese society and culture. Listed below are some of the topics:

1. Introduction to varieties of Chinese language, social development and language change
2. Chinese government structure and politics
3. Economic reform and opening in China
4. Chinese military
5. Social problems in contemporary Chinese society
6. Chinese history (modern)

7. Legal system and practices in China
8. China's educational system and reform
9. China's agriculture and industry
10. Chinese culture and value system
11. Family issues (women, children and old people)
12. Political movements and their significance in China
13. Mass media and public opinion in China
14. Population and ethnic issues in China
15. Business practices in China
16. Foreign policies and foreign affairs

The first 10 topics are considered as the core, while the remaining 6 are optional. But not all topics are covered in one course. We have to select topics according to students' need: the length of their training time, their background, future assignment, and their own interest. Usually we have one topic per week for a full-time schedule class, which means six hours a day, and five days a week. This is a very intensive language training program. The course consists of five activities: reading, listening (audio and video), lecture, discussion and student's report. These activities are designed to develop students' sociolinguistic and strategic competence as outlined by Canale & Swain (1980). I will now discuss how each of the activities is carried out and their outcome.

3.1. Reading

All reading materials are authentic materials from different sources with different writing styles and difficulty levels, such as items from encyclopedia, articles from newspapers and magazines, and chapters from books as well as novels. The content of these readings is related to the topic of the week. Students are required to understand the language as well as the message in each reading. During one week's time, students have to read a lot of materials related to the topic. They are constantly exposed to the same category of vocabulary in different readings. By such an approach, they can learn many technical or special terms that they will not normally do in a regular textbook.

Students are also directed to pay special attention to (1) culturally-loaded vocabulary; and (2) how information is organized and how a message is conveyed in Chinese writing, which may be quite different from the way it is done in English writing. For culturally-loaded vocabulary, students have to know the historical or cultural background information to fully understand the meaning of these words or phrases. Otherwise students often get the feeling that they can read every character, but just do not understand what the text is saying. For instance, the word *mianzi* (face) is an important concept in the Chinese context. It carries such implications as showing social status (e.g. *you mianzi* -- have face), and the way politeness behavior is perceived (e.g. *mei mianzi* -- lose face).

These culturally-loaded vocabularies require special attention and detailed explanation.

As for the way of organizing information, students will learn to be sensitive to cohesive devices and patterns of presentation of ideas in Chinese. For example, Young (1982) noticed that Chinese tend to build up reasons before they give their opinions in an argument. This argument pattern may seem strange to English speakers who are used to making one's opinion clear and then developing the supporting argument. So when students read a Chinese article, they may have difficulty comprehending the message due to the different ways of presenting information and argument in Chinese culture. Therefore it is highly important to cultivate students' sensitivity to discourse strategies in Chinese.

Reading in such a way helps students develop their sociocultural knowledge as well as discourse competence. Through this activity, the student's vocabulary is greatly increased and his/her knowledge about the topic concerned is also enriched.

3.2. Listening

Listening activity consists of two parts: one is to listen to audio tapes; the other is to watch TV programs or Chinese movies. All the listening materials are related to the topic. The objective of the listening activity is three-fold: to

increase their listening comprehension, to enhance their background knowledge of Chinese culture, and well as to learn the way Chinese people interact with other.

Movies, especially those reflecting characteristics of Chinese culture, are extremely useful to achieve the three-fold objective. For instance, when talking about family issues, the movie "The Family" (based on Ba Jin's novel "The Family") is shown to students. First of all, they have to understand what is going on in the story (listening comprehension). Secondly they get an idea of the structure of a traditional Chinese family at a given historical period, the relationship among family members, as well as the moral concept and problems in a big family (cultural background knowledge). Thirdly, they are required to discover interactive strategies, such as: how people greet each other on different occasions, how conflict is handled and how they express feelings of joy, sorrow, gratitude or anger (Chinese interactional style).

After watching a movie, students will recapitulate the story and have discussion with the teacher, who points out some special features as to how and why people do things in a certain way and the cultural significance of such an act. Students then make comparisons between American and Chinese ways of behavior on similar occasions. So this activity not only increases students' listening comprehension, but also provides them with a situation in which they can observe the Chinese behavioral pattern, and as

a result, learn to develop their own interaction ability and strategic competence by imitating the native speaker's behavior.

3.3. Lecture

This is the activity that brings 'real life' into the classroom. The lecture is conducted not by the teacher, but by a guest speaker. For each topic, a native speaker of Chinese who is specialized in the field related to the topic is invited to give a talk to students in Chinese. For example, when studying the topic of the legal system and practices in China, a Chinese lawyer, who just came from China to do research on legal issues at an American institution, is invited to talk about legal practices in China.

There are two advantages to having a guest speaker give lectures. First, students have the opportunity to meet with and talk to native speakers other than the teacher. These guest speakers are from different parts of China. Though they all speak Mandarin, they may speak it with some accent. At this stage, it is very important for students to get used to people speaking Chinese with different accents. Secondly, these guest speakers are specialists in the field. They can give students a comprehensive introduction to one aspect of Chinese society as well as the latest developments in the field. During the question and discussion period, students can have a direct interaction with native speakers. This will help them to get a

feel for how Chinese is used in a real world speech event. Therefore this activity builds up students' background knowledge of Chinese society and culture, increases their listening comprehension, and provides them with an opportunity to act in a natural speech event.

3.4. Discussion

Discussion is an important part in the course. It enhances students' understanding of why and how things are the way they are in a certain aspect of Chinese culture. By discussing a topic with the teacher, the lecturer and classmates, students learn to employ communication skills like making an argument, presenting one's opinion, using confrontation strategies and management of conflict talk.

What we do is after each reading, students are required to comment on the viewpoint and supporting arguments of the writer, whether they agree with the writer or not, as well as their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing. Discussions are also carried out after each movie and lecture. During the discussion section, both the teacher and students express their opinions about the issue. Comparison is made between characteristics of Chinese culture and American culture. For instance, when discussing government structure, the organization and function of the government in both China and United States are compared and contrasted, such as how the National People's Congress in China

is formed and how it functions, as well as the differences between the U.S. Congress and China's Congress. This kind of comparison is important because in terms of semantics, the word 'congress' will not show the difference between the Chinese Congress and the U.S. Congress. But in terms of sociocultural meaning, they are quite different. By engaging in this kind of discussion, students not only learn to use the vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices they learn from reading and listening --- a stress on language production, they also have a better understanding of the topic --- a stress on sociocultural knowledge.

3.5. Student's report

By the end of each week, students have to give a presentation of the topic discussed during the week. By then, they already have enough input and vocabulary to give a summary of the issues covered in the topic concerned. The presentation has to include information about the topic and use the special vocabulary to describe it. Students are instructed to prepare a 20-minute report at the end of each week. The report can be a summary of the topic, or comments on some particular aspect of the topic, or a combination of both.

This activity helps students develop their ability to synthesize and organize all they have learned during the course and their ability to present their thoughts. They have to learn

discourse strategies such as opening of a presentation and ending of a talk in a way that is appropriate in Chinese culture. They also learn to employ cohesive devices to make smooth transitions between points and parts in their talk. All this falls into what Canale & Swain call 'discourse competence'.

3.6. Teacher's role

As Canale & Swain point out, the teacher should 'take on an activating role as the instigator of situations which allow students to develop communication skills' (1980:33). Following this argument, the teacher is not merely someone who lectures or gives instructions. Instead, he/she interacts actively with students. The teacher's role is to be a participant in the discussion and interaction with students. During the whole course, the teacher functions as a representative of Chinese language and culture and participates in all activities with students. The teacher usually asks students a substantial number of questions so as to motivate them to talk and make comments. The teacher also offers his/her opinions on the subject being discussed. The teacher and students may not achieve consensus on the issues concerned. But what is important here is that students will learn to employ such communication skills as to defend their position, to present their points of view, to agree or disagree. The focus here is still language skills and interaction strategies. It really does not matter whether the

teacher and students share common opinions.

4. Conclusion

A topical approach as described above can be considered as a comprehensive approach, which combines all sorts of teaching materials (reading, audio, video, movie, and native speakers). It attempts to provide students with a Chinese context in which they can learn how to use the language appropriately and the norms and pattern of behavior in Chinese culture.

It is essential to understand that hard facts of a culture are distinct pieces while the behavioral pattern is the system. What is needed is to ensure that students will put everything into the system, and not just collect broken facts. The attempt to include cultural elements in this case is to provide students with the ability to think globally. Only with this framework, can students put into use all the hard facts that are learned or picked up in the course of learning. The systematic introduction by topics, which is typical of a content-based approach in teaching, is to guide students to the social system as a whole. Obviously, we cannot teach students to immediately incorporate or digest both the language and the value system. What we are trying to do is to teach students a way of thinking, and given the language knowledge that has been acquired, students will eventually find their own system.

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